



Volume 83 No.1 MELBOURNE, JANUARY/MARCH 2000 THE TEST OF ENDURANCE

"Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" (1 Kings 20. 11.)

The test of endurance is certainly one of the severest tests of faithfulness to which the elect Church, the Body of Christ, is subjected. It is the test which gauges and registers the strength of every other virtue and grace, and no soldier of the cross will be crowned with the laurels of victory who has not stood this test. The Christian life is a warfare, and the above words of one of the kings of Israel to a boastful enemy of the Lord's people, are applicable, not only to every new recruit in the Lord's army, but, similarly, to all who have not yet finished the good fight of faith.

The first gush of enthusiasm in the Lord's service, much as we may and do appreciate it, may be but the hasty production of the shallow soil of a heart which immediately receives the truth with gladness but, having no root in itself, endures but for a time, and afterwards, when affliction and persecution arise, immediately is offended. (Mark 4. 16-17.) Such characters cannot stand the fiery tests of this "evil day", whereof it is written – *"The fire (of that day) shall try every man's work, of what sort it is".* (1 Cor. 3. 13.)

Therefore, says the Apostle Peter, *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."* (1 Peter 4. 12.) All of the elect Church must be so tried; and blessed is he that shall endure unto the end. The sure Word of prophecy points to severe conflicts and great trials in the closing scenes of the Church's history. Elijah, a type of the Body of Christ, finished his early career and went up by a whirlwind and a chariot of fire – strong symbols of storms and great afflictions. John, another type of the Church, was cast into prison and then beheaded. And we are forewarned of the great necessity of the whole armour of God, if we would stand in this "evil day".

It therefore behoves every one who aspires to the prize of our high calling to brace himself or herself for the severer conflicts and trials of faith and patience that may suddenly and without a moment's warning be sprung upon them. In the battle of this day, as in all battles, the effort of the Enemy is to surprise and suddenly attack and overwhelm the Lord's people; and the only preparation, therefore, that can be made for such emergencies is constant vigilance and prayer and the putting on of the whole armour of God – the Truth and the Spirit of Truth.

"In your patience possess ye your souls." No other grace will be more needed than this in the fiery ordeals of this "evil day"; for without patience no-one can endure to the end. All along the Christian's pathway, ever and anon, they come to a new crisis; perhaps these are often seemingly of trivial importance, yet they realise that they may be turning points in their Christian course. Who has not realised them? There comes a temptation to weariness in well-doing, together with the suggestion of an easier way; or there springs up a little root of pride or ambition, with suggestions of ways and means for feeding and gratifying it. Then there comes, by and by, the decisive moment when you *must* choose this course or that; and lo, you have reached a crisis!

Which way will you turn! Most likely you will turn in the direction to which the sentiments you have cultivated have been tending, whether that be the right way or the wrong way. If it be the wrong way, most likely you will be unable to discern it clearly; for your long cultivated sentiments will sway your judgement. *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death."* (Prov. 14. 12) How necessary, therefore, is prayer; that in every crisis we may pass the test successfully! Nor can we safely delay to watch and pray until the crisis is upon us; but such should be our constant attitude.

The life of a soldier, ever on the alert and on duty, is by no means an easy life; nor do the Scriptures warrant any such expectation. On the contrary, they say "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ"; "Fight the good fight of faith". And yet many Christian people seem to have the very opposite idea. Their ideal Christian life is one without a breeze or a storm; it must be one continuous calm. Such a life was indeed more

possible in former days than now, though the world, the flesh and the Devil always have opposed them, and always have had to be resisted by every loyal soldier of the cross. But now the opposition is daily becoming more and more intense; for Satan realises that his time is short, and he is determined by any and every means to exert his power against the consummation of the Lord's plan for the exaltation of the Church.

Consequently, we have many and severe storms of opposition; and still there are doubtless more severe trials to follow. But those who, with overcoming faith, outlive them all – who patiently endure, who cultivate the spirit of Christ with its fruits and graces, and who valiantly fight the good fight of faith, rather than withdraw from the field – such will be the “overcomers” to whom the laurels of victory will be given when the crowning day has come. (R.1656)

REJOICE EVERMORE Thess 5:16)

Be glad that your life has
been full and complete;
Be glad you have tasted both bitter and sweet;
Be glad you have walked
in both sunshine and rain;
Be glad you have felt both
life's pleasure and pain;
Be glad for the comfort that you
found in prayer -
Be glad for God's blessings,
His love and His care.

(From Sr. Schulz)

“That your Joy Might be Full”

Our Lord left many precious legacies with His disciples when He departed from them. Apart from their treasured memories of the years spent in His presence, of His loving character, His wondrous works, His matchless words, He left them His peace, He promised to send them the Holy Spirit to be their Comforter and guide when He had gone, and He also left them the gift of joy, as we read in John 15:11, from which the title is taken – *“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full.”*

At other times, He told them that in the world they would meet with tribulation and opposition, and at many times in the past and today in some lands these have been and are very real and very severe. Even in our own comparatively peaceful society, Christians are being daily more reviled. “Yesterday's People” was how one of our political leaders described Christian leaders in recent times when they spoke out on matters of Christian values and principles. No doubt he echoed the sentiments of many in our society and we remember our Lord's words, speaking of this end of the age – *“because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall grow cold.”*

Yet our Master's provision for His disciples and for His people down through the gospel age was that His joy might stay with them and their joy be complete. How can this be? What are the qualities of His joy that can enable the believer to rejoice even in trial? What are its source and foundation, and perhaps even more to the point for us, do we experience that joy in our own lives, are we able to pass something of it on to others? Joy can be infectious and we all remember, no doubt, with special delight those whose faces and demeanour have lit up our lives with their radiant joy in the Lord.

THE SOURCE – ABIDING IN HIM

It is notable that the words of our subject were uttered by our Lord after He had recounted to His disciples the illustration of the vine and the branches. He had been stressing the need for fruit bearing, for growth and development in character and in Christian life and testimony, but the key to this was “abiding in Him” as pictured in the abiding of the branches in the vine. We don't use the word “abide” so much nowadays but it speaks of permanency of relationship, of becoming established. The complete dependence of the branches on the vine in the illustration leaves no doubt as to the only source of Christian vitality and joyful living.

“Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, no more can you, unless you abide in me. If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full.” Let us note carefully that it is our Master's joy that we are to have and be filled with. What was our Master's joy? We shall return to this later.

Christian joy comes then from that relationship with our Lord that is so close that it is termed “abiding in Him”. We see this in human relationships – what joy there is in the presence of those we love, either in the realm of natural ties or in the blessed bonds of Christian love! What glorious rejoicing there is in meeting up

again after separation from those who are in our hearts and our love, as we are in theirs! Such a joy in our Saviour can sustain us even in trial, as Peter tells us after speaking of the trial of our faith – “*Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, you love; in whom, though now you see Him not, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*” (*1 Peter 1:8*)

The Psalmist says – “*In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*” (*Psalm 16:11*) Some of his joy here is prospective, but David knew, as the Lord’s people of this age should also know, the joy of the divine presence here and now. *lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the age*” are our Lord’s own words of assurance. The source then of our joy is not in favourable circumstances, wealth, status, or any other thing, but in a person, our dear Saviour and Lord.

THE FOUNDATION – GOD’S WORD

But joy must also have a firm foundation, even as faith and hope must. Just as Jesus Christ is the source of our life and peace, so is He and His finished work the foundation of our faith. “*For all the promises of God are in Him yea, and in Him amen.*” An empty joy would be the height of foolishness. The Christian’s joy needs to be one that is fully aware of the circumstances of life with its perils, of the need for circumspection and the use of the faculties with which God has endowed His creation, but can still rejoice, confident in the divine love and care and the sure promises and provisions of God’s word.

If Christian joy is to surmount disappointments and difficulties, it must have this sure foundation. For the believer, this is the Word of God and the message of His love as portrayed in all His dealings with mankind, culminating in the gift of His dear Son to be the Saviour of the world. Joy and faith must go hand in hand, and in one of his benedictory greetings, the apostle prays – “*now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit.*” (*Romans 15:13*) Here faith, hope and peace, with the indwelling Spirit of God are all linked with joy – “may God fill you with all joy and peace in believing.”

THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN JOY

How then would we characterise Christian joy? We have seen that its source is Jesus Christ Himself, that its foundation is in the Word of God, that it is centred in Christ, further that it is a substantial not a vague or empty joy. Different people have varying ideas as to what makes for joy or happiness – pleasure, excitement, friends and so on, but all too often there is little, if any, residual joy in such outward things. To be of any real value, joy must be an inward and a deep and lasting experience and this is the very essence of Christian joy.

Among our Lord’s final words to His disciples on the night on which He was betrayed are those recorded in John 16:19-22 - “*Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto them, Do you enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while and you shall not see me, and again, A little while and you shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you. That you shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and you shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy... you now therefore have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you*””. They were about to encounter separation from the one they had come to love and trust so much, but He assured them that not only would their sorrow be turned into joy but that no one could deprive them of that joy. This assurance is true also of the peace which He gives. As with joy, it is “in Christ” that the Christian has peace.

This joy is then not a fleeting or illusory experience but a deep and inner conviction, not reliant on outer conditions or momentary pleasure, not appealing to the sensual instincts, but to the consecrated heart and mind. It should nevertheless move believers to the expression of their joy as a testimony and encouragement to others. Some detractors of the Christian faith depict its followers as gloomy, killjoy types and sometimes some may seem to dwell overmuch on human wickedness, coming times of trouble, etc. Christians cannot ignore such things, which are foretold in God’s word, but their assurance is in Jesus’ words – “*In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*” (*John 16:33*).

PEACE AND JOY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and then the infilling of that peace of God which passes human understanding which follows faith are then necessary pre-requisites for true Christian joy. A full assurance of faith is also needful to ensure complete confidence and joyful trust in the outworking of God’s purposes in each one’s life. Such joyful assurance enabled the two captives in the Philippian gaol to sing praises to God at midnight. And what an influence that had on the gaoler and his household. The joy of each Christian can and should still shine through and be a blessing to others in any situation. “*Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer.*” (*Romans 12:12*)

There is also a need for a sure hope within before there can be full and real inner joy. Speaking of death and resurrection, the apostle Paul says that Christians sorrow not as others who have no hope. The Christian’s hope is as certain as the word of God Himself, with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning.

“Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.” It was for the joy set before Him that our dear Saviour endured the cross, despising the shame and being faithful unto death is now seated on the right hand of God. The Christian hope is spoken of as *“an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the fore-runner is for us entered, even Jesus.”* (Heb 6:19,20)

But the Christian’s joy, however real and sure, cannot be or remain a selfish possession, indifferent to the sufferings and difficulties of others. The apostle instructs us – *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”* There may well be little that we can do in the wider sense, but to those about us, those with whom we have to do, our neighbours, our families, our brethren, let our inner joy be expressed in the kindly word or deed, perhaps just in the happy smile or greeting. May our joy, our peace, our gentleness, toward those we meet show to others that we too “have been with Jesus.”

JOYFUL IN TRIBULATION

To the unbeliever, probably the strangest feature of the Christian life is that even in adverse circumstances, their inner joy can still shine through. This is not to suggest that their experiences will in themselves be enjoyable; some indeed have gone through unimaginable trials for their faith, but the assurances of God’s word have stayed with them and enabled them to endure - *“if you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons... now no chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby.”*

James’ words would take us even further – *“count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience, but let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”* Once more, the thought is not that the trials themselves will be any cause for rejoicing but the evidence of our Heavenly Father’s working out of His perfect will in us reinforces the assurance of His fatherly love and care and in this we can indeed rejoice, for it is those whom He loves that our Father chastens, and in the awareness of this divine oversight of our lives the Christian may calmly rejoice.

The testimony of the prophet Habakkuk expresses the thought poetically – even though all surrounding circumstances conspire against him, he can and still will rejoice – *“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”* In all such expressions of joy in trial, one common factor can be seen, namely that the joy is not in the trial itself but in the Lord and in His dealings with each one.

PURPOSE IN CHRISTIAN JOY

Another feature of Christian joy and one which sets it apart from other “joys” is a reality of purpose. Many in the world have materialistic objectives or pursue self-gratification, but these seldom bring any measure of lasting inner joy or peace, conversely they often bring grief and loss. On the other hand, for Christians, the gift of life in Jesus Christ has brought them into a new relationship, into a family – the family of God’s children, into the plans and purposes of God’s boundless love and mercy. These provide blessings beyond comparison even now and hold prospects of future blessings for all mankind. The Psalmist’s words sum up the Christian’s privileged state – *“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound, they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.”*

There are truly many grounds for Christian joy but the inner confidence and joy of each one is not given for selfish retention but for passing on as we are able to others, perhaps merely in the cheerful smile, the hopeful word, the kind act. The clearer understanding of death, resurrection and judgment with which the Lord’s people have been blessed in these last days is a rich treasure and there are hearts out in the world desperately in need of comfort and consolation. These days not many seem to want to respond to the call to discipleship but we can minister where opportunity presents itself in this area of concern to many. Surely, we have a real message of hope – *“Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning.”* *“till the day break and the shadows flee away.”*

“THAT MY JOY MIGHT REMAIN IN YOU”

Let us now return to our Lord’s words in the text verse - *“These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full.”* We have seen that the secret of Christian joy rests in “abiding in Him”, in His love and His ongoing provision, and is founded on the sure and faithful promises of God’s word. Just as in the illustration which our Lord had shortly before given, the branches draw their sustenance from the vine, so the Christian is nourished by the Holy Spirit promised by our Lord. So it is not surprising that joy is listed among the fruits of the Spirit, second only to love.

But we note that the Christian’s joy is to be that of the Master Himself – that MY joy remain in you. What

then was our Master's joy? Surely, it was the daily doing of the Father's will. "*My meat is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work.*" "*For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me.*" So our Lord passes on to us His exhortation – "*If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love.*" The path of trust and obedience is surely the way of true Christian joy.

Go, labour on; spend and be spent -

Thy joy to do the Father's will;

It is the way the Master went;

Should not the servant tread it still?

JOY IN HIS PRESENCE

The ultimate joy of the Lord's people when they enter into the presence of their Lord we cannot really grasp but we know from the foretaste granted to us here and now that we will be able to say with the Psalmist - "*I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness*". We are assured by the apostle John that when He, our dear Lord and Saviour, shall appear, we shall be like Him and see Him as He is. In the meantime, the message to us as children of God, seeking to follow in the Master's steps, is to serve Him with gladness, to present always a positive testimony to His goodness and mercy in our lives, to look beyond the problems of our day to God's glorious tomorrow.

In speaking to others, let us not dwell unduly on the evils and iniquities of the world, but rather remember that the gospel entrusted to us is, by definition, "good news". Let us be bearers of good tidings to any with an ear to hear, not only at Christmas but at all times. By God's grace, may we each seek with the apostle of old to finish our Christian course with joy and if faithful enter fully into the perfect joy of the Lord.

Amen.

My Joy Remain: Your Joy be Full

(John 15:11)

Our Lord concluded the little lesson of the Vine and the branches, so short and yet so full of meaning and depth, with an illustration of why He gave it, saying - "*These things I have spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*" These wonderful words of life have come down to us through the centuries and have helped to cheer and encourage so many of the Lord's followers in the narrow way.

Many objections are raised against, pure and undefiled religion. Some complain that it is gloomy, joyless, a fetter upon the heart and brain; that it drives people from every temple of pleasure with a whip of small cords; that it posts notice, "No Trespassing Here", in every field of enjoyment. Our answer must be that this is a mistake; that these are the words of those who do not know or understand what they are speaking about.

Those who have truly made a covenant with the Lord, who have truly accepted Him, who have truly laid down their lives at His feet and become His followers in sincerity, are filled with His joy, as He promised. Moreover, it is an increasing joy, which day by day and year by year becomes more nearly complete. This joy will not be complete however until that which is perfect shall come and that which is in part shall be done away with; until in the resurrected condition we shall see as we are seen and know as we are known; and appreciate to the full the joys of our Lord, hearing His welcome invitation, "Enter into the joys of thy Lord."

We enter now into those joys through faith, through anticipation, through rest of heart, but by and by, we shall enter upon them in actuality. Meantime, it is the world which has not submitted itself to the Lord that does not appreciate the joys of the Lord, but is full of selfishness and ambition and strife and envy. The world does not know us even as it did not know Him. It does not know our joys in the Masters service even as it never appreciated the joys of our Lord in doing the Father's will, even at the sacrifice of His life. (Selected)

The Life of Stephen.

The words of our Lord and the Apostle in Rev.2:10, and 2 Tim. 3:12, seem specially applicable to Stephen, as he was one of the early Christians who was literally stoned to death on account of his loyalty to His Master and the truth. What we know of Stephen is recorded in Acts 6 and 7, which consist mainly of a discourse of defence given by him when brought before the Jewish council charged with blasphemy. It has been said that his words read more like the language of the Apostle Paul than that of any other New Testament writer, and we can trace through his statement a character worthy of being copied by all who are endeavouring to follow in the footsteps of the Master.

We first read of Stephen when he was chosen as a deacon along with six others to relieve the Apostles from the service of temporal things; he was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, an eloquent speaker and very zealous in proclaiming the truth – Acts 6:8.

The Church at this time was in its infancy and was rapidly increasing. This caused much opposition and hatred from a class of scribes and rulers who were endeavouring to uphold their traditions, and they wrongly accused Stephen of blasphemy. See Acts 6:12-14. After the false witnesses had given evidence he had the opportunity of defending himself in this very dangerous position which no doubt he realised to the full – set before a council of excited and angry people who were determined to take his life at any cost. Yet the record says, “All that sat in the council looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” What a testimony this is of Stephen’s faith and confidence in God; well did he know that the Lord was on his side and had confidence in His words – Luke 21:15.

Stephen’s discourse was based on Jesus and the resurrection. Beginning with Abraham he traced the history of Israel down to his own day, showing the Lord’s leadings with them and making particular reference to Moses – Acts 7:37. He was drawing attention to the fact that just as Moses had at first been rejected by Israel, so the one “like unto Moses” – Jesus – had been rejected by them. Nevertheless, as Moses afterwards became the leader and deliverer of the people, so also Jesus in due time would be the greater Deliverer.

Continuing, he showed that God at first established the tabernacle in the wilderness and then the temple at Jerusalem, and further that God has now provided that a still higher temple should take the place of the building made with hands. As it was not blasphemy to accept the temple of Solomon instead of the tabernacle of Moses, so neither should it be so considered to accept the higher spiritual temple of which Jesus is the Head, in place of the earthly temple. His words were so logical and convincing that his accusers could not resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke.

The words of Acts 7:51-53 were evidently the outcome of interruption by his hearers, and given as a rebuke, indicating that they were responsible for the death of Jesus, and this made them more angry. They could see that he was innocent of the accusations, yet were determined to kill Him. We realise that Stephen’s face was still aglow with joy and peace of mind in the privilege of the last opportunity of proclaiming his faith in the resurrected Jesus and seeing the angry faces of his accusers caused him to cast his eyes heavenwards – verses 55, 56. This vision was no doubt given to strengthen his faith for his death just at hand. The explanation of it gave his accusers the opportunity they were waiting for, as they evilly construed it to be additional blasphemy – verses 57-60. Thus we have recorded the death of the first Christian martyr – “They stoned Stephen... and he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge; and he fell asleep.”

The events leading up to Stephen’s death were very similar to those preceding the death of his Master. Our Lord was falsely accused of blasphemy against God and the temple and brought before the Jewish council and condemned. Stephen no doubt had all this in mind throughout his own trial; he had consecrated to follow in his Master’s footsteps even unto death, and had the faith and courage to fulfil his vow. What an example he is to all who have entered into the same covenant; we should also be faithful unto death by whatever means our Father may permit. It has been said of the life of Stephen, “The lesson for us all is faith, courage, zeal, a loyal heart, a shining face, love and prayers for our enemies – to see that none render evil in return for evil.”

Let us all be copies of Stephen and do good unto all in the face of the greatest opposition. We may not be persecuted as was Stephen and other early Christians, but we all need to develop the same traits of character as were manifest in them. The following quotation seems to sum up Stephen’s life: “The beneficent influences of the Gospel of Christ since Stephen’s day so permeated the civilised world, and so affected it, that the followers of Christ are not at present in danger of being stoned to death for preaching the Gospel. Nevertheless, the Apostle’s words still hold good – 2 Tim. 3:12. It is still necessary to suffer with Christ if we would be glorified with Him and share with Him in the coming Kingdom.

But the persecutions of today are more refined than in any previous period. The faithful today are not stoned with literal stones, or shot with literal arrows, or literally beheaded, but it is still true that the wicked shoot out arrows at the righteous, even bitter words, and many because of faithfulness are reproved and slandered and cut off from fellowship – beheaded for the testimony of Jesus – Rev. 20:4. Let all such emulate Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Let their testimony be given with radiant faces like his. Let their eyes of faith perceive Jesus at the right hand of God, as their Advocate and Deliverer. Let their words be with moderation as were Stephen’s, and let it be true of them as written of him, “full of grace and power” and “filled with the Holy Spirit.” (JBH:38)

“Riches of Glory”

(Continued from last issue)

Ephesians 3:14-21

The Apostle, in continuing his prayer for the “saints at Ephesus” and “the faithful in Christ Jesus,” beseeches the Father that they might “Know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge.” What does Paul mean? Can we take this as literally true and applicable to each member of the Church as individuals? We appreciate things by comparison. Does Christ’s love for us surpass, say, that of a mother’s love for her child?” Pure mother love is the most self-sacrificing love on earth. Within its own limits of the family, mother love is a beautiful symbol of the love of God for all his children. It is like a sample of sea water within the restricted limits of a cup, as compared with the illimitable ocean. How impossible it would be, however, for this mother love to contemplate Gethsemane and Calvary for her son on behalf of their enemies and deliberately to arrange for it in advance.

When Paul speaks thus of the love of Christ in this prayer, he speaks from the depths of his own experience. In Galatians 2:20, he says: “I have been crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live. And yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life that I live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*.” A mother’s love is like the knowledge-surpassing-love of Jesus, in that she bestows on her family as a whole, the whole of her mother love. Mother love, however, is not rationed so that the more children she has, the less of her love there is to go round. The love of Christ is the love of God, that “Immortal love, forever full, forever flowing free; forever shared, forever whole, a never ebbing sea.”

Incredible as it may seem, Jesus loves each of us with the whole of his love. Had you or I been the only one in all the world needing salvation, what he did for all, he would have done for you or for me. If a mother has four children and one of them is in such danger that she can save him only at the risk of her own life, she does not take a twenty-five per cent risk because he is only one of four. She does what mother love can’t help doing; she goes all out to save her boy. So it is with Jesus. In the parable of the hundred sheep, only one was lost, but the shepherd left all the others and went all the way, in his utmost endeavor to save it and bring it back to the fold.

Paul’s appreciation of this personal love of Jesus shines through all his epistles and was the mainstay of his life. This it was that sustained him in all his sufferings for the Gospel’s sake. The sublime summit of his great epistle to the Romans is reached in chapter eight, and the very topmost pinnacle is this same love of the Lord, his Lord and ours. How wonderful are verses 35 to 39: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“THAT YE MIGHT BE FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD”

The idea in the above words seems to be that of being filled with all the overflowing superabundance that there is in God. As if we should say, The fullness of the Great Lakes in North America overflows in the glory of Niagara Falls. Or that the sun radiates into space everywhere surrounding it, its glorious, abundant wealth of light, heat, and power, of which our tiny planet partakes to its fullest capacity.

God is the perennial and inexhaustible Fountain of Life, the Source of every blessing. Adam received of God’s fullness at his creation. The lower orders of the animal creation in the progressive stages of their development had been partakers of God’s bounty up to the level of their being, but for man it was reserved that he should be filled with all the fullness of God, as the image and glory of God. Were we to go to Niagara with a cup and fill it at the mighty falls, how small it would look in comparison. Yet, up to its capacity it too would be filled with the fullness of the Great Lakes behind.

Paul is speaking in his prayer not of the old creation, but of the new. What copper is to gold, perfect human nature is to the divine. God made man in his own image, a human likeness of himself. Of the New Creation, however, we are told: “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the *image of his Son*.” Not a human image but a divine image. Of man it was said: “After our likeness let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over the cattle and over all the earth.” But of the New Creation it is written: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.”

Filled thus with all the fullness of God, partakers of the divine nature, possessing a divine body with all its unimaginable properties and powers, what a glorious inheritance utterly beyond our finite comprehension awaits the Church beyond the veil. Here and now, however, we have an earnest of this inheritance. As a present possession we can be filled with all the fullness of God, through the possession of the Holy Spirit. Referring to our Lord, John says (John 1:16): “Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Each grace in Him through the power of the Spirit can be reproduced in us, thus resulting in our being conformed to His image.

Paul gives us a wonderful list of the results of the infilling here and now of this fullness of God. It comprehends everything the heart could wish for, leaving nothing to be desired. He speaks of it in terms of the choicest fruit. (Gal. 5:22, 23.) “The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance, faith.” What lovely gardens our hearts would be; what delightful sources of fragrance and refreshment could they contain for others; what places of quiet retirement for ourselves, if the fruit of this heavenly tree was everywhere in evidence in vigorous, healthy growth? Ah, yes, we say, but how can I ever have such a garden? Listen now to what Paul has to say in the Doxology with which he ends his prayer.

“EXCEEDING ABUNDANTLY ABOVE ALL THAT WE ASK OR THINK”

Oh, for more of Paul’s enthusiastic faith! See how he takes this statement, wonderful in itself, that *God is able*, and magnifies it over and again for us. “Unto Him *that is able to do all that we ask*.” How different from earthly fathers who find themselves powerless so often, through lack of means, to grant their children’s requests for things in themselves innocent and good. But God is able to do not only all that we ask, but *all that we think*. There is nothing that we can think of that is beyond God’s ability to grant us. But Paul continues, and inserts the word *above*, making it read, “above all we ask or think.” But Paul is not satisfied even with this, and goes on to add another word, *abundantly* above; and yet another word, *exceeding* abundantly above. “Unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,” is His grand finale.

Paul is like some great master of music seated at an organ worthy of his skill and power, who has one of the grandest of themes to express and develop, entitled, “God is able.” As we listen, softly come the opening strains, “Able to do all we ask.” Then the music increases in volume as the theme develops into “Able to do all we ask or think.” Then as other stops are brought into requisition and more power is applied, the exquisite music swells with the next movement into “Able to do above all we ask or think.” This leads us on to the grand crescendo and climax which thunders and throbs through the great cathedral in waves of richest harmony: “Unto him that is able to do *exceeding abundantly* above all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the Church.

This is not merely abstract thinking, theoretical reasoning. It is not based upon what God has done in his mighty works in far-off places and far-off times, but upon what God is doing *in us here and now*. Notice the wonderful truth that Paul adds to all the foregoing, telling us that it is all “according to the power *that worketh in us*.” The power was laid on at Pentecost and has been available to every member of the Body of Christ since. All we have to do is to switch it on by the exercise of faith. Do we find ourselves always doing so?

How exceeding abundantly above all they could ask or think were God’s dealings with Israel. The ten plagues culminating in the death of Egypt’s first-born; the deliverance through the Red Sea after the seemingly hopeless position at the water’s edge; two millions of men, women, and children in the wilderness for forty years; guided through the trackless desert, supplied with water in the sandy wastes, provided with sustenance in lands where no crops could grow. Surely all this was exceeding abundantly above all they could ask or think.

Yet of Natural Israel it is said, “They limited the Holy One of Israel.” Thirty-eight years before they did so, they could have entered the promised land. The forty spies who were sent out brought back a glowing account that it was even as God had promised, a land flowing with milk and honey. In proof they brought back a huge bunch of grapes which it took two men to carry. But along with this glowing account of the land, all but two of the forty spies reported that it was quite impossible for Israel to go in and take possession of it. The cities were impregnable, with walls which reached up to heaven. The men of the cities were giants before whom they seemed as grasshoppers. And so “they could not enter in because of unbelief.” – Heb. 3:19.

How is it with us? Do we ever find ourselves wandering in the wilderness when we should be resting in the enjoyment of the promised land? Do we listen to the voices within of unbelief or act on the inspiration of faith? Are we free of all trace of care, worry and anxiety? Knowing that God is so superabundantly able, do we think big things about God and ask big things from God? Is my faith such that I rest in complete assurance that above all I ask or think; nay, abundantly above all I ask or think; or does even that, not sufficiently express the fullness of my faith so that I say, “Exceeding abundantly above all that I ask or think God is able” to meet every contingency? A contemplation of this wonderful prayer should verily make us realize that God gives to His children “according to the riches of His glory.”

“UNTO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH BY CHRIST JESUS”

This last portion of Paul’s prayer underlines what God expects of us in view of all the provisions He has made for us from His riches in glory. In rendering His report to the Father in John 17, our Lord said, “I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work thou gavest me to do.” His mission on earth, to glorify God, was passed on to his church, collectively and individually. “Unto him be glory in the Church,” through the person and power of Christ Jesus our Head and Pattern. The ultimate question which each of us must put to ourselves is, therefore, Is God being glorified in me? Our constant aim should be to make this true day by day,

so that like our Lord we might be able to make report with joy at the end of the way.

God's purpose is that there shall be unto Him glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, and this not only throughout the Gospel Age, but "throughout all ages, world without end, Amen." What wonderfully long views the Bible gives us! The outlook on the future from the standpoint of the world and the standpoint of the Christian is like the contrast between an outlook over the slums and that over the wide open spaces of some beautiful stretches of God's country. Think of the glorious panorama of sea, mountain, and sky that you may have witnessed in the highlands. There as we have looked upon range on range of mountains seemingly endless in the blue distance, we may have thought how very suggestive of the expression we have here, "throughout all ages, world without end."

In the foreground of the picture we think of that noble Millennial mountain of the Lord concerning which the Bible has so fully informed us. But what of all these other peaks fading away into the blue distance of the ages to come? What is the content of Ephesians 2:4-7: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"? What do these ages to come have in store for us from the "riches of his glory"? Our reply must be, "Now we see as through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now we know in part, but then shall we know even also as we are known" (The Herald)

MY PRAYER

Grant me, O Father, according to the riches of thy glory, to be strengthened with might by thy spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in my heart by faith; and that I might be rooted and grounded in love, and thus be able to comprehend with all saints the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the mystery of thy will in Christ; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, and so to be filled with all the fullness of God. Thou art able to do for me exceeding abundantly above all I can ask or think, according to the power of thy spirit working in me; enable me therefore to live to thy glory as a member of thy Church here and now, and throughout all ages, world without end, through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen. (A.D. Kirkwood)

"Strengthen thy Brethren"

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."
Luke 22:31,32.

Jesus told Peter that when he was "converted" he was to strengthen the brethren, and in his first epistle we find him so doing. He begins by pointing out the fact that the sufferings of Christ had been foretold by the prophets through the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter says that the Holy Spirit "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." – 1 Peter 1:11

Later in the epistle Peter explains that the footstep followers of Jesus share in these foretold sufferings. He writes, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." – 1 Peter 4:12, 13) When one suffers it is a great source of strength to know the reason for it, and here Peter is reminding us that there is the best possible reason for our suffering as Christians; that reason being that it is the divine will, having been foretold by God's holy prophets.

Again Peter writes, "What glory, is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (1 Peter 2:20, 21) Peter was grieved when he saw Jesus suffer for well-doing, but through his conversion he came to understand that this was the divine will for his Master, and that it is now God's will for Jesus' disciples.

Peter says further on the subject of Christian suffering: "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled." (1 Peter 3:13,14) We have a good example in Jesus of the principle involved in this exhortation – "Who... will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" True, they brought cruel suffering upon Jesus. They placed a crown of thorns on His head, and they 'hung Him on a cross until He died, but they did not eternally harm Him! They only completed the sacrifice which He had covenanted with His Father to make.

As a new creature Jesus was not harmed. All that happened was that through death and resurrection He exchanged His cross for a crown. And it will be the same with us if we continue faithfully to lay down our lives,

following in the Master's footsteps. This is what is involved in what Jesus said to Peter prior to His crucifixion; that one saves his or her life by voluntarily losing it through sacrifice.

GOD'S CARE

How welcome should be Peter's admonition, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7) God's care of His people is exercised in many ways – through the Holy Spirit; by the guardian angels; through His Word of truth; and by our association with the brethren. We need all these helps, especially when we are suffering with Christ. While everything is going well, we might be inclined to overlook the need of God's care. But we need Him *all* the time, in fair weather and in storms; may we never fail to seek the throne of heavenly grace in our *every* time of need.

Peter adds that we are to "be sober", and to "be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." (1 Peter 5:8,9) Satan attacks the Lord's people along many lines, but here the apostle seems to be reminding us that his attacks will come through efforts to discourage us because of our afflictions; and indeed this is one of Satan's methods of attack.

We are to resist these attacks through stedfastness in the faith – our "most holy faith" (Jude 20) It is through this most holy faith that we understand the reason for Christian suffering. If we do not know why we are suffering, we are vulnerable indeed to Satan's endeavours to discourage us. But how different it is when we know that we have been called to suffer with Christ – to enter into a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice; to take up our cross and follow Him.

THE JOY OF FAITH

Enlightened Christians who are faithfully laying down their lives will not ask why they are suffering, but will rejoice in the fact that they are partakers of the sufferings of Christ, and will in due time partake of His glory. Rejoicing in the most holy faith, these will realise that Christ suffered and died as mankind's Redeemer, and that they have been invited to die with Him, to be planted in the likeness of His death so that they might also be the likeness of His resurrection. (Romans 6:5)

They will know that it will be in the "first resurrection" that they will enter into His heavenly inheritance, and have the privilege and honour to be associated with Jesus in the promised blessing of all the families of the earth. They know that eventually all suffering and death will be destroyed, and the whole earth will be filled with the Lord's glory. For these reasons, they will not allow Satan's roars to frighten them, and will continue to cast all their cares upon the Lord. ("Dawn")

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,"

The Intents of the Heart.

(Psalm 139:23.24)

The Scriptures make it very clear that God, our Heavenly Father is able to know our every thought and motive, and that there is nothing we can hide from Him. This understanding should have a very sobering effect on us. We accept the Bible record and the fact that God is the Creator of man, and seeing He created the marvellous mechanism of the brain, He can also read the thoughts it records. We are unable to do this. We can only know what is in the mind of another as it is revealed by word or deed, and so can gain only a superficial understanding of others as we know what they say or do.

It is interesting to read the selection of David as king of Israel, as recorded in 1 Sam. 16: 7 – "But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." The dictionary has a good description of what the heart represents. It reads, – "The heart is the chief organ of the physical life and occupies a most important part of the human system. The word came to stand for man's mental and moral activity. The heart is used figuratively for the hidden springs of the personal life. The heart being deep within, it represents the hidden man. It represents the true man, which is concealed."

DAVID CHOSEN

Samuel was sent by the Lord to select and anoint the king for Israel, to be chosen from the sons of Jesse. The seven older sons were passed over, though by appearance they would have been acceptable. David, though smaller and not so attractive, was selected. "The Lord looketh upon the heart." It was David's sincere heart loyalty that later on allowed him to be forgiven when he committed sins. All our thoughts and motives are naked before the Lord. There is nothing we can do to hide them from Him. If we recognise this, it should help us to watch our -thoughts and motives very carefully. It could be an encouragement to us as we realise

our mistakes and failures are not of the heart, and God deals with us according to our heart intentions.

This seems to be the thought the Apostle has in mind in Heb. 4: 14-16, when he says, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." We can come boldly, or with confidence, to the throne of grace, because we know that through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus we can seek forgiveness for our unintentional sins, if our hearts are right in the sight of God.

When Jesus was on earth, He was able to read the thoughts and intents of the hearts of others. This was through the power of the Holy Spirit. We remember the time when Philip introduced Nathanael to Him, and He said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." This surely indicated that He knew the heart of Nathanael, even before he was introduced to Him.

"LOVEST THOU ME?"

This is clearly shown also in the life of Peter. Just before He was crucified, He told Peter he would deny Him three times. Peter did not think this was possible, and said to Jesus that he would die for Him before denying Him. No doubt Peter sincerely meant this, but Jesus knew when the test came Peter would deny Him. Peter learnt the lesson. That Jesus knew this in advance and foretold it made a very marked impression on Peter's mind. Later on, after Jesus' resurrection, Jesus was to remind Peter that He knew the thoughts and intents of his heart.

The incident is recorded in John 21. It was here that the disciples decided to return to their fishing business. They laboured all night without catching a fish. In the morning they saw a stranger on shore. He questioned as to whether they had any fish, and the answer being "No", the stranger advised them to cast the net on the other side of the boat, and to their surprise the net was filled. A similar miracle had occurred when Jesus first called them to follow Him, so they knew this was Jesus. Peter swam ashore to greet Jesus, and they made a fire and prepared a meal and ate together.

It was after eating together, and still on the shore of the lake, that Jesus questioned Peter. He said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He said unto him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee, Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."

That Jesus asked Peter three times, "Lovest thou me?" must have taken Peter's mind back to the time when, before the crucifixion, he denied Him three times. This must have been a reminder to Peter that Jesus still knew every thought and intent of his heart. By now Peter realised he could hide nothing from his Master. That is why he said, "Lord thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee."

Yes, Jesus did know what was in Peter's heart, and He knows what is in our hearts. In the resurrection Jesus was exalted to the Divine nature, and it is true of Him, as it is of our Heavenly Father, that all the thoughts and intents of our hearts are open and naked before Him; He knows us better than we know and understand ourselves. This would be a terrifying thought if we did not know that. He is our sympathetic Advocate before the Heavenly Father, and that God does not look upon us according to our imperfect, fallen flesh, but according to the intentions of the heart.

THE FIRST LOVE

We get a similar lesson from the message to the church at Ephesus. Though the messages to the seven churches cover the period of the church's history, it is true of a group of Christians or an individual Christian at any time. This message says, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted." These are wonderful commendations indeed. But the Lord said, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

This could be true of us. It seems important that when we realise our hearts are open and naked before God, we should search our own hearts, and this should be a lesson from the message we have just read. When we look back over our past, especially to the early years of our consecrated life, have we the same love for the Lord now as we had then? Our love for the Lord will be shown by our love for the brethren. If Jesus said to us today, "Lovest thou me?" could we answer as Peter did, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?" If because of weakness of the flesh our good intentions fail, we have an assurance from the

Apostle Paul, “Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, and find mercy and grace to help in time of need.”

We saw earlier that David was selected as king of Israel because God knew his heart. Later on he did commit some sins which were not good in the sight of God. David sought forgiveness, and was later restored to favour with God. He said, “Search me, O Lord, and know my heart.” We also should be pleased, as were David and Peter, that God knows our heart. David seems very much impressed with this thought, for in the Psalms so many times he mentions how the heart should be kept. Psa. 51: 10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” He also said in Psa. 19: 14, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer.” JBH: 66

“Consecrated, Lord to Thee”

(The following tribute to the life and work of Frances Ridley Havergal was published in the December 1936 issue of “Peoples Paper” to mark the 100th anniversary of her birth. The author’s name is unknown).

Frances Ridley Havergal was born on the 14th December, 1836, and, in due course, every talent she possessed was consecrated to the Lord. She recognised early that, ‘in God’s great field of labour, all work, is not the same; He hath a service for each one who loves His Holy Name’, and, as we sing the praises so ably written and expressed by this servant, our thanks ascend to the ‘Giver of every good and perfect gift’, for the faithfulness displayed in the use of these gifts. Her pen ceased not to declare in a most pleasing ministry the praises of Him who knew no sin.

*Father; we bless Thee with heart and voice
For the wondrous grace of Thy sovereign choice,
That patiently, gently sought us out
In the far off land of death and doubt;
That drew us to Christ by the Spirit’s might,
That opened our eyes to see the Light,
That arose in strange reality
From the darkness that fell on Calvary.*

(Isa 62:12, Eph 2:13)

There was also in her music constantly a sense of insufficiency in self, and a desire to ‘Let every thought be captive brought, Lord Jesus to Thine own sweet obedience – That I may know in ebb-less flow, the perfect peace of full and pure allegiance.’ (2 Cor 10:5)

While we would draw attention to her many delightful works, we would also call to remembrance that in her ministry much pain was endured, inasmuch that, in the employment of her talents for the Lord, many were drawn to herself. These she had to re-direct, and while she cherished dearly the love and affection of many, she desired it only for Jesus. “I want you” was said to many, “but I want you for Jesus.”

*Singing for Jesus, our Master and Friend,
Telling His love and His marvellous grace, Love for eternity, love without end;
Love for the loveless, the sinful and base, Singing for Jesus and trying to win
Many to love Him and join in our song...*

God has surely supplied all our need. Some may appreciate a particular ministry more than another, and yet, as one string reverberates faithfully the music it is intended to sound, its companion strings will, if in tune, reciprocate and accord sympathetically. One hundred years (has not dimmed) the music of love that rings out from the heart of Frances Ridley Havergal.

“VESSELS OF MERCY, PREPARED UNTO GLORY”

(by Francis Ridley Havergal)

Vessels of mercy, prepared unto glory!

This is your calling and this is your joy!

This, for the new year unfolding before thee,

Tells out the terms of your blessed employ.

(Rom 9:23)

Vessels to honour; made sacred and holy.

Meet for the use of the Master we love,
Ready for service all simple and lowly,
 Ready, one day, for the temple above.
(2 Tim 2:21)

Yes, though the vessels be fragile and earthen,
 God hath commanded His glory to shine;
Treasure resplendent henceforth is our burthen,
 Excellent power; not ours but Divine
(2 Cor 4:5.6)

Chosen in Christ ere the dawn of Creation,
 Chosen for him to be filled with his grace,
Chosen to carry the streams of salvation
 Into each thirsty and desolate place.
(Acts 9:15)

Take all Thy vessels, O glorious Refiner;
 Purge all the dross, that each chalice may be
Pure in Thy pattern, completer, diviner,
 Filled with Thy glory and shining for thee.
(Prov 25:4)